

Dt: 2/15/13

To: Joint Appropriation Sub-committee -- Budget Hearing

Fr: Alicia Moe, Owner & General Manager of Cream of the West, Harlowton, MT

Re: Public Testimony regarding Incumbent Worker Training Program

Chairman Osmundson and members of the committee

My name is Alicia Moe . I am a current owner and the general manager of Cream of the West, located in Harlowton, MT. Cream of the West has been manufacturing and selling food products made from Montana grains since 1914. Next year we'll celebrate Cream of the West's 100th birthday.

I'll start with a brief history of how Cream of the West ended up in Harlowton, which will also help to explain why I'm here today.

In 2002 eight of us were searching for a way to help Wheatland County's shrinking economy. Cream of the West was for sale and we felt it was the perfect match for us and for our rural community. And, we were right about that!

We also thought that knowing how to grow grain meant we'd know how to market and sell it. About that, we were very wrong! None of us had degrees in marketing nor experience in retail food sales. And, while our hearts were in the right place... our skills were not.

Thankfully, Montana has an Incumbent Worker Training Program. The high-quality, on target training that we have gotten because of this program has helped us gain essential skills to survive in a tough business environment.

Flexibility is a key asset in the Incumbent Worker Training Program. As business owners, we can choose the type of training we and our employees most need, when we need it. For example, last year I attended a seminar on how to grow your business while my partner attended another on social media marketing. Our production manager and quality control person attended a two-day training on Food Safety. In 2010 when we added organic products, our office manager and bookkeeper attended a tailor-made training in using QuickBooks to establish an audit trail. These are just a few examples of the excellent training we have received thanks to funding provided by this program.

Montana is fortunate to have a high number of entrepreneurs and small business owners. These are people whose passion and commitment keep our state's economy vital and growing. But, many, like me need high quality training to survive and grow our businesses. Funding 'spot-on' continuing education to develop skills is exactly what this program does and, hopefully, will be able to continue doing.

The Incumbent Worker Training Program is one from which everyone benefits. Thank you for your time.